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THINKING *Units of Study* THROUGH *in Reading and Writing Workshops 4-12* GENRE

HEATHER LATTIMER



Stenhouse Publishers
Portland, Maine

Frank Gilbreth, Jr., and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, *Belles on Their Toes; Cheaper by the Dozen*
 Francisco Jimenez, *The Circuit*
 Anita Lobel, *No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War*
 Adeline Yen Mah, *Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter*
 Walter Dean Myers, *Bad Boy: A Memoir*
 Gary Paulsen, *Guts; Harris and Me; My Life in Dog Years; Woodsong*
 Johanna Reiss, *The Upstairs Room*
 Sara Shandler, *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Self*
 Gary Soto, *Living Up the Street; A Summer Life*
 Yoshiko Uchida, *The Invisible Thread: An Autobiography*
 Laurence Yep, *The Lost Garden*

Grades 10+ (Adult)

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
 Jean-Dominique Bauby, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*
 David Faber, *Because of Romek: A Holocaust Survivor's Memoir*

The following texts approximate memoirs; they are fictional accounts written as if they were true memoirs. While purists may want to use only true memoir texts, we found that these texts were very helpful and that students were able to understand the differences and use the fictionalized memoirs appropriately.

Grades 3–6

Paul Fleischman, *Seedfolks*

Grades 6–10 (Young Adult)

Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

These texts are not memoirs, but they are a great help to students writing memoirs:

Grades 6–10 (Young Adult)

Melvin Burgess, *Billy Elliot*
 Ralph Fletcher, *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You*
 Lois Lowry, *Looking Back: A Book of Memories*
 William Zinsser, ed., *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*

Grades 10+ (Adult)

William Zinsser, "Writing About Yourself: The Memoir," ch. 14 in *On Writing Well*

Feature Article

From "Death of an Innocent: How Christopher McCandless Lost His Way in the Wilds"

Jon Krakauer

James Gallien had driven five miles out of Fairbanks when he spotted the hitchhiker standing in the snow beside the road, thumb raised high, shivering in the gray Alaskan dawn. A rifle protruded from the young man's pack, but he looked friendly enough; a hitchhiker with a Remington semiautomatic isn't the sort of thing that gives motorists pause in the 49th state. Gallien steered his four-by-four onto the shoulder and told him to climb in.

The hitchhiker introduced himself as Alex. "Alex?" Gallien responded, fishing for a last name.

"Just Alex," the young man replied, pointedly rejecting the bait. He explained that he wanted a ride as far as the edge of Denali National Park, where he intended to walk deep into the bush and "live off the land for a few months." Alex's backpack appeared to weigh only 25 to 30 pounds, which struck Gallien, an accomplished outdoorsman, as an improbably light load for a three-month sojourn in the backcountry, especially so early in the spring. Immediately Gallien began to wonder if he'd picked up one of those crackpots from the Lower 48 who come north to live out their ill-considered Jack London fantasies. Alaska had long been a magnet for unbalanced souls, often outfitted with little more than innocence and desire, who hope to find their footing in the unsullied enormity of the Last Frontier. The bush, however, is a harsh place and cares nothing for hope or longing. More than a few such dreamers have met predictably unpleasant ends.

As they got to talking during the three-hour drive, though, Alex didn't strike Gallien as your typical misfit. He was congenial, seemed well educated, and peppered Gallien with sensible questions about "what kind of small game lived in the country, what kind of berries he could eat, that kind of thing."

Still, Gallien was concerned: Alex's gear seemed excessively slight for the rugged conditions of the interior bush, which in April still lay buried under the winter snowpack. He admitted that the only food in his pack was a ten-pound bag of rice. He had no compass; the only navigational aid in his possession was a tattered road map he'd scrounged at a gas station, and when they arrived where Alex asked to be dropped off, he left the map in Gallien's truck, along with his watch, his comb, and all his money, which amounted to 85 cents. "I don't want to know what time it is," Alex declared cheerfully. "I don't want to know what day it is, or where I am. None of that matters."

During the drive south toward the mountains, Gallien had tried repeatedly to dissuade Alex from his plan, to no avail. He even offered to drive Alex all the way to Anchorage so he could at least buy the kid some decent gear. "No, thanks anyway," Alex replied. "I'll be fine with what I've got." When Gallien asked whether his parents or some friend knew what he was up to—anyone who could sound the alarm if he got into trouble and was overdue—Alex answered calmly that, no, nobody knew of his plans, that in fact he hadn't spoken to his family in nearly three years. "I'm absolutely positive," he assured Gallien, "I won't run into anything I can't deal with on my own."

"There was just no talking the guy out of it," Gallien recalls. "He was determined. He couldn't wait to head out there and get started." So Gallien drove Alex to the head of the Stampede Trail, an old mining track that begins ten miles west of the town of Healy, convinced him to accept a tuna melt and a pair of rubber boots to keep his feet dry, and wished him good luck. Alex pulled a camera from his backpack and asked Gallien to snap a picture of him. Then, smiling broadly, he disappeared down the snow-covered trail. The date was Tuesday, April 28, 1992.

More than four months passed before Gallien heard anything more of the hitchhiker. His real name turned out to be Christopher J. McCandless. He was the product of a happy family from an affluent suburb of Washington, D.C. And although he wasn't burdened with a surfeit of common sense and possessed a streak of stubborn idealism that did not readily mesh with the realities of modern life, he was no psychopath. McCandless was in fact an honors graduate of Emory University, an accomplished athlete, and a veteran of several solo excursions into wild, inhospitable terrain.

An extremely intense young man, McCandless had been captivated by the writing of Leo Tolstoy. He particularly admired the fact that the great novelist had forsaken a life of wealth and privilege to wander among the destitute. For several years he had been emulating the count's asceticism and moral rigor to a degree that astonished and occasionally alarmed those who knew him well. When he took leave of James Gallien, McCandless entertained no illusions that he was trekking into Club Med; peril, adversity, and Tolstoyan renunciation were what he was seeking. And that's precisely what he found on the Stampede Trail, in spades.

For most of 16 weeks McCandless more than held his own. Indeed, were it not for one or two innocent and seemingly insignificant blunders he would have walked out of the Alaskan woods in July or August as anonymously as he walked into them in April. Instead, the name of Chris McCandless has become the stuff of tabloid headlines, and his bewildered family is left clutching the shards of a fierce and painful love.

So I don't get it, am I supposed to feel sorry for the guy?" Carolyn Sommer looked at me with frustration. She and I had sat down with this article during spring break as we met to plan for a nonfiction feature article study with her students. "I mean, here's a young man who, from the sounds of it, has everything going for him and he walks into the woods, and dies. What a waste!"

I couldn't help but agree. It was a waste. But there was a reason that I had dragged out this article. It is a decade old now, but Krakauer's account of McCandless's life and death continues to have a grip on me. This haunting story of a young man who gave up everything to pursue an ideal that benefited absolutely no one is perplexing and troubling. A former young idealist myself, it makes me question my own pursuit of idealistic objectives; as a teacher of young people it disturbs me; as a mother of two young sons, it scares the heck out of me. But more than anything else, it makes me think.

Despite Carolyn's initial frustration, it was clear as we discussed the article that "Death of an Innocent" made her think as well. We talked about the fine line between brilliance and craziness, between idealism and obsession. We discussed the difficulty of following one's ideals in our society and the ridicule that individuals who choose to do so often face. Where was McCandless in this balance? Should he be admired or admonished? Krakauer's article opens the door for these questions but leaves the answers unclear. He presents a portrait of a complex young man. He tells of the hurt that McCandless caused but also the friendship that he easily engendered among those he met. He describes McCandless's search to find his way in terms that anyone who has been through adolescence and young adulthood can relate to. The article becomes about more than just one young man; it becomes a query into our own understanding of our individual relationship with the world around us.

As our coffee grew cold and our time ran out, Carolyn pushed back from the table and sighed. "You know, if that had been a simple, straightforward newspaper article that just told the facts I probably could have dismissed it fairly easily. I could have simply chosen to believe that McCandless was a crazy person who had no relation to my reality at all. But Krakauer doesn't allow me that comfort. He's taken those facts and shown me the story behind them. He's humanized McCandless. And now I'm not going to be able to forget the story either."

Thinking Through the Genre

Good nonfiction shouldn't let readers forget. It should capture readers' fascination and spark within them an intense desire to learn, not just about interesting people and places, but about ideas and perspectives. This is what a feature article is all about. Feature articles and similarly styled nonfiction texts take information about people, places, events, or phenomena in the world and seek to explain it. And, as readers, it is this explanation that we crave. We now live in a society where multiple twenty-four-hour news stations and Web sites constantly update us about the latest events. The Internet gives us instant access to an almost unlimited supply of facts on every imaginable topic. But despite this, magazines like *Newsweek*, *Time*, *National Geographic*, *People*, *Smithsonian*, *Vanity Fair*, *Esquire*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Rolling Stone* continue to thrive. Why? Because we like to have the facts explained to us; we want to learn from other people's perspectives and appreciate their insights.

Tracy Kidder wrote a best-selling book entitled *House*. The entire text is essentially a collection of feature article-style essays about the aspects of building a house. To most of us, the idea of reading several pages about the creation of a wooden plank would seem remarkably boring. However, Kidder's gifted style and unique understanding of the wood and its significance hold readers spellbound. What Kidder offers is not really the wood or the paint of the house itself, but his own transparent presence. Zinsser (1998) writes,

Ultimately, the product that any writer has to sell is not the subject being written about, but who he or she is. I often find myself reading with interest about a topic I never thought would interest me—some scientific quest, perhaps. What holds me is the enthusiasm of the writer for the field. . . . This is the personal transaction that's at the heart of good nonfiction writing.

Introducing a feature article study into the classroom provides students with the opportunity to understand the fascination that can be found in reading and the enthusiasm that can be communicated through writing great nonfiction. Too often the nonfiction that students encounter in the classroom is driven by facts, not ideas. This is unfortunate, because it limits appreciation for both the text and the subject. Most of us would balk at reading an entry about the Civil War from a U.S. history textbook—too dry, too filled with boring facts, too bossy. I don't want a committee-designed textbook telling me "everything I need to know in five easy lessons." But an article about counterespionage efforts by the Confederate army or about sunken Union warships would fascinate me. These articles examine the same time period but offer a more specialized focus. They don't try to be authoritative; instead, they put forth a unique perspective that readers have the opportunity to assimilate

into their own understanding of the War Between the States. Yes, such texts do offer facts, but they also encourage thought, raise questions, and inspire interest in the topic. These are the texts that we need to put in front of students.

As a teacher, I want my students to understand that the world is not just about facts, it is truly about ideas—individual understandings of how facts are put together based on one's own experience and knowledge. I want them to know that they have the power, as readers, to interact with a nonfiction text, to do more than simply dig for facts. Students need to be able to see the ideas in texts, to understand the author's perspective or bias, and to connect the understanding of the author with their own outlook on the world. Reading feature articles in the classroom provides students with an outstanding opportunity to achieve these goals.

Teaching students to write feature articles presents them with a vehicle through which to communicate their own unique understanding of the world. Too often students feel that the "experts" are much more learned and far away. Teaching them to write a feature article empowers them to recognize that their voices have power, that their perspectives are valid and important. It supports recognition of the fact that the world beyond their immediate community may be different and that what seems commonplace to them may be a revelation to a potential audience. This understanding, in turn, encourages more thoughtful observation of the writer's own environment. Writers of feature articles learn to find fascination in the commonplace as well as the remarkable. They learn to pursue that fascination to uncover new worlds of understanding. Lucy Calkins (1994) explains, "Living like a nonfiction writer, then, means watching for surprise and perplexity and mystery. It means knowing that even the subjects we know very well can be endlessly new to us."

Furthermore, teaching students to share their understanding of the world with others through the genre of a feature article ensures that they will articulate their ideas in a thoughtful and rigorous format. Feature articles require research, analysis, synthesis, organization, and good, strong writing. This is not simply a "put the facts in the right box" report; this is literary journalism. Writers of feature articles need to be aware of their craft and their voice. They are writing to share their own understanding with an audience, and as such, the manner in which they write matters.

Envisioning the Unit

Put simply, Carolyn's students didn't like nonfiction. These were fifth- and sixth-grade students at Wilson Academy, a school located in one of San Diego's poorer neighborhoods. In general, they were a good group. The class had been identified as high-achieving; most students read two to three grade levels above expectations;

they engaged in wonderful discussions; and they had a great relationship with their teacher. But all of that changed when the fiction books were set aside. Suddenly, the students went from being happy and engaged to being grumpy, reluctant readers.

This transformation is not unusual. It comes from the belief that nonfiction texts are all boring. It is the fear of having to write a report or research paper—dull, scary assignments that students hate to write and teachers hate to read. And it comes from loss of confidence. Most students' comfort zone is with fiction; it is what they are familiar with and consequently what is easiest to read. Nonfiction offers a different structure and style, and for many it is intimidating.

Carolyn understood her students' reluctance to read and write nonfiction, but wisely she decided to forge ahead. She knew that her "babies" would soon be entering the big, bad world of middle school. In history or science class, they would be expected to read and respond to expository text. They could groan all they wanted, but this was a reality they wouldn't be able to avoid. Furthermore, Carolyn knew that as adults her students would absolutely need to be able to read and write nonfiction texts; this is a prerequisite for success in our information-driven society.

As Carolyn and I worked together to plan a nonfiction study, we decided to focus primarily on feature articles. The articles are short and engaging, and pictures, illustrations, and a wonderful variety of topics would help to pique students' interest. The style of text would allow us to push students beyond the "scan-and-dip" style of reading that had previously characterized their interactions with nonfiction (Calkins 2001). Thoughtful, idea-driven feature articles would provide the opportunity for students to see, understand, and respond to the ideas inherent in nonfiction text. Furthermore, the unique and at times quirky variety of topics appropriate for feature articles would ensure that every student would be able to write as an expert about something important to them. This would move students away from the perception that writing nonfiction necessarily means hours and hours of book research that results in putting the correct facts in the correct boxes. Instead students would be pushed to recognize their unique understanding of familiar people, places, events, and phenomena, and then share that perspective with others using appropriate writing structures and processes. Through a study of reading and writing feature articles, Carolyn and I hoped to capture students' interest, not only in the genre but in exploring and thinking deeply about the world around them.

Teaching the Unit—Reading Workshop

We began the study by filling the classroom with the sight and sounds of feature articles. Carolyn filled baskets with current and back issues of *National Geographic*

Reading Workshop—Feature Article Goals and Instructional Focus Progression

	Reading Comprehension Study	Accountable Talk Study
	Goal: Students will learn to read and understand feature articles. They will recognize the ideas in text and understand the relationship between information and ideas.	Goal: Students will learn to share nonfiction articles with peers through informal discussion and formal presentation.
Weeks 1–2	"Reading" Text Features Students will learn to use titles, photos, section headings, illustrations, captions, etc. to gather relevant information before reading the text. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you see on the page? • What information can you learn from the features? • How do you think this information might help you as you read the article? Predicting the "Big Idea" Students will synthesize prereading information into a larger understanding, or "big idea," that will guide their reading. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think the author or editor chose to include these features and this information? • What do you think the author wants you to understand about this topic? • What can you expect as you read the article? 	Developing Appropriate Attitudes and Behaviors for Peer Talk Students will learn what is appropriate to say and do when discussing nonfiction text with a peer. Discussing an Article Students will learn to effectively discuss nonfiction articles with peers in order to better understand a common text. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your understanding of the article? What is your partner's understanding? • How are your ideas the same? different? • Does evidence from the text support both of these ideas? If not, why not? • Can your ideas be synthesized into a larger understanding?
Weeks 3–4	Developing Your "Big Idea" as You Read Students will use their "big idea" as they read, continuously developing and expanding their understanding in response to new information and ideas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop and think. What new information have you learned? • How does this new information fit with what you already knew? • How does this new information change your understanding of the text? What's the "big idea" now? Outlining the Ideas and Information in Text Students will learn to thoughtfully organize the ideas and information in text in order to better understand the article. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most important pieces of information within each section of text? • What is the main idea of each section? • How do the section ideas fit together? What is the "big idea" of the article overall? 	Presenting an Article Students will learn to prepare and present an independently read article to peers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most important information and ideas to share? • How can information and ideas be organized to make things clear for your listeners? • How should you begin your presentation? • How can you adjust your presentation to suit your audience? • How should you conclude your presentation?
Weeks 5–6	Responding to an Article Students will learn to respond appropriately to the ideas and information in nonfiction feature articles. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the ideas and information in this article connect to what you already know? • Do you have questions or concerns about the ideas or information explored in the article? • Do you think that the author treated this issue appropriately? Was he or she biased in the presentation of information? Explain. Evaluating Reading Progress—Self-Reflection and Teacher Evaluation	Responding to a Peer Presentation Students will learn to listen and respond appropriately to a peer presentation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you learn from the presentation? • What questions do you have? about the article? about the presentation? • What did the speaker do well? • What would you suggest he/she do differently during future presentations? Evaluating Peer Presentations—Self-, Class, and Teacher Evaluation

Explorer, *Time for Kids*, *World Magazine*, *Ranger Rick*, *Scientific American Explorations*, *Muse*, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, and *Discovery Girls*. She pulled particularly engaging articles out, stapled them to bulletin boards, and hung them from a clothesline. In addition, she began to read nonfiction aloud. Choosing carefully, she would begin each morning with a funny, scary, or disgusting article about shark attacks, human anatomy, or beauty queens. These articles not only helped to build student interest but helped students' ears become familiar with the sounds and structures of nonfiction. Lucy Calkins refers to this as developing students' "internal containers."

Read-alouds and a classroom filled with great texts provided a wonderful start. It got students to the table. They loved listening to and talking about each day's read-aloud article. They loved looking at the magazines. But they still weren't reading the articles. Instead they were flipping from page to page, admiring the pictures and perhaps vaguely skimming the captions. A few students would try their hand at the text, but even these adventurous souls didn't manage to get very far. After observing this behavior for a couple of days, Carolyn called me, concerned. "I thought for sure that students would be able to read these magazines. I know that the vocabulary is not too hard, but they just don't seem to be able to sustain an interest. Many don't understand what the content is about. They don't have the background knowledge to be able to read and understand the text. I don't know, maybe this study is too hard."

Carolyn was right. Her students had neither the content knowledge nor the strategy tools for accessing most nonfiction articles yet. But this didn't mean that the texts were too hard or that she should give up. It meant that we needed to teach students how to scaffold nonfiction articles for themselves. Scaffolding is something that we often talk about doing for students; science and history teachers spend hours and hours developing creative ways to scaffold textbooks so that students can access them. But ultimately our goal should be to provide students with the tools so that they can scaffold texts for themselves, to help them build a content and structural knowledge to be able to read a wide range of nonfiction articles.

We decided to begin by focusing on background knowledge. Given the wide range of student interests and article focuses in the classroom, there was no way that we could introduce students to every topic. But we could teach them to use the features on the page to build an understanding of the content before they even began reading the text. Titles, pictures, captions, fact boxes, section headings, and so on reveal a lot about an article. Good readers use that information to develop content expectations that guide their reading of the text itself. The following lesson demonstrates Carolyn's introduction to the use of text features.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 1—Reading Workshop

AREA OF STUDY: Reading comprehension

FOCUS: "Reading" text features

TEXT: "Paid to Play Games," by Robert Sullivan, from *Time for Kids*

RESPONSE: Gathering information from text features and recording findings on Post-it notes

Carolyn gathered her students on the rug. They each sat in their own chair with a highlighter, pen, stack of Post-it notes, and a copy of the most recent *Time for Kids* magazine in their laps. "So, how are feature articles going?" Carolyn asked. After a few minutes for responses, Carolyn added her own observations to the conversation: "As I've been working with you while you are reading, I've noticed some really good things and some not so good things. One thing you are all doing that I think is fantastic is you are looking at the pictures in the magazines. Some of you may think that this is just fluff and not really part of reading, but you'd be wrong. Good nonfiction readers look at pictures all the time. But, I've noticed that many of you aren't getting all the information you can out of the pictures and the other features. That's a problem because good readers don't just look at the pictures, they 'read' them, trying to learn all the information they can from each picture. You can also read captions, titles, maps, graphs, anything that the author or editor put on the page to support the text itself. And then you can use all that information to help you read and understand the article."

Students opened their copies of *Time for Kids* to the center article, "Paid to Play Games." This two-page article discussed the astronomically high salaries of professional athletes and compared the salaries of Shaq and Alex Rodriguez to those of teachers and the president. We had chosen it to use today because it contained a rich variety of text features, everything from digitally altered photos to bold statistics to an eye-catching border at the top of the page. "Tell me," Carolyn began, "what features do you see on the page?" For now the names of the features didn't matter (this would come much later in writing workshop when students were working on publishing their own articles); what was important was that students notice the features. Too often, young readers have been trained away from looking at the features, told to skip right to the text, and frequently students won't even see the features on the page. "A picture of Shaq," one student shouted. "A piggy bank," said another. As students described what they saw, Carolyn highlighted the features themselves on the transparency of the article that she had placed on the overhead; she encouraged students to do the same in their magazines. Gradually, with a few well-phrased questions ("What about around the outside of the text? Notice anything?"), students were able to notice all the features on the page.

"Okay," Carolyn said, "now let's go back and 'read' these features more carefully. What information can we get from each of them?" Faces that had become relaxed and open took on a blank look. Many felt they had just "read" the features. "It's a picture of Shaq, what more do you want to know?" one student asked. "Well, if I were 'reading' that picture," Carolyn modeled, "I would see that Shaq (and I know that's his name because it says so in the caption) is wearing a basketball uniform, but he's not holding a basketball, he's holding a coin. And the way the picture is placed makes it look like he is tossing the coin into a piggy bank. I also notice that the coin Shaq is holding is a one-dollar coin, the largest denomination of coin that exists. All of that suggests to me that Shaq is a basketball player who is paid a large amount of money to play a game, and that he is able to deposit that money into his own bank account." Carolyn recorded some of her observations on a transparent "Post-it" (also known as a cut-up transparency and a bit of tape) and placed it on the appropriate feature on the overhead. Understanding dawned and hands began to go up. Together the class went through the rest of the article, reading the features and recording their observations on Post-it notes.

Before she sent students off to practice reading features independently, Carolyn made sure they understood the purpose of the strategy: "Look at all the information we have gathered. How is all that going to help me once I start to read the text of the article?" One student volunteered, "You already know some of what you are going to read." "You know what the article is about," explained another. "You can connect what you read to the pictures and headings." All true. We would need to push the point further at a later date, but for today the students understood their task and the reasons behind it.

Carolyn equipped students with Post-it notes and sent them off to read the text features in articles of their own choosing. She and I circulated, pointing out additional inferences that could be drawn from a photo or title and encouraging students in their work. Most understood their task well and were able to come up with some great insights into the text based solely on the features. Despite the fact that students were "just" looking at the features, many spent perceptibly more time with each article on this day than they had on previous days, when it was expected that they would be reading the whole thing. Of course, a few students did read the text itself after completing their prereading activity (which was fine; we had not forbidden it, just not encouraged it). Several explained that it was hard to resist after they'd gotten interested in the article from their work with the pictures and titles; they wanted to find out more. My favorite comment came from Angelica, a bright little girl who had remained sulkily silent throughout Carolyn's mini-lesson: "At first I thought this was really stupid. I mean, it's so obvious. But once I started reading the features I found other stuff that I hadn't noticed at first."

And then when I read the article, it was easier to understand. Maybe it's not such a stupid idea after all." High praise from a sulky sixth-grader.

It took several days of practice for students to become truly adept at using text features to gather information. Carolyn found herself teaching lessons about charts, graphs, and maps—graphics found frequently in feature articles that were not familiar to all students. But over time students became more comfortable recognizing and using features. They began to point out similarities across texts, patterns found in certain publications, and occasional inconsistencies between the work of authors and that of the copy editors who put together the page layout. An additional finding that was noticed by a couple of the students was the use of puns in titles. Double meanings, alliteration, homonyms, and puns were frequently used to engage the audience and support the ideas of the article. For most students, however, this word play went right over their heads. Although understanding the word play in nonfiction articles is not absolutely crucial to understanding the text, it does make the text more enjoyable and supports language development as well. Consequently, Carolyn and I decided to teach a lesson about this aspect of feature articles.

SAMPLE LESSON: **Week 2—Reading Workshop**

AREA OF STUDY:	Word study
FOCUS:	Recognizing and understanding the word play in titles
TEXT:	Various
RESPONSE:	Identifying word plays in previously read articles

On chart paper at the front of the room, Carolyn had listed several titles taken from magazine articles that students had not previously seen. "Going the Distance," "A Head Start," "It's About Time," "The Heat Is On," "The Mane Attraction." Each of these titles had double (or in some cases, triple) meanings related to the article it headlined. Students did not have the articles in front of them. Carolyn knew from experience that photos and captions caused students to see only one aspect of a title; by taking away that context, she wanted them to see additional possibilities.

"You have become awesome feature readers," Carolyn said. "And you know that titles and subtitles are a great way to get information before reading. So, we have some titles up here, and without your seeing the article, I want you to tell me what the article will be about." Heads nodded in agreement; these kids were confident in their abilities. "So, what do you think an article titled 'Going the

Distance' will be about?" Student response was immediate: "Going someplace far away, like maybe Alaska or Antarctica." "Working hard on something for a long time . . . what's that word? . . . perseverance." "I think of distance as about racing, so maybe it's about a marathon or something." "But, it's gotta be about going, too. Maybe going a long way to run a marathon?" Carolyn recorded their responses on the chart paper and then revealed the article from which the title had come. It was a story about international athletes who come to the United States to compete. It profiled Martina Navratilova, Manute Bol, and Mark Plaatjes, describing their decisions to leave poverty or oppressive governments to pursue opportunity despite meeting some difficulties in the United States. Carolyn talked a bit about the article and then asked, "So, who was right about the meaning of the title?" "I was!" was the immediate response from five different directions. Carolyn let the students debate their own correctness for a few minutes before interrupting, "Yes, you were all right. The article is about traveling a long distance, and it is about perseverance, and it is about running or other types of athletics. That is the point. Authors often use titles with multiple meanings to get readers thinking and draw them into the ideas of the text. Let's try some more."

This felt like a game, and students delighted in challenging one another to discover additional meanings of titles. They worked through Carolyn's list of titles, sharing their ideas first with a partner and then with the whole class before briefly viewing the articles to see if their ideas fit. Title interpretations became more and more creative. Some suggestions were way out of the ballpark, but students also came up with ideas that Carolyn and I had not considered but that added a whole new dimension to understanding the article. Once it was clear that students understood expectations, Carolyn sent them on a hunt. "Go back to some of the articles that you have already explored. Take a look at the titles, and see if you can catch any word play. If you find multiple meanings, highlight that title and write the possible meanings down on a Post-it."

For some students, the Post-its flew onto the page; they were able to immediately recognize multiple meanings. Others stared at titles for a long time before recognizing the word play. A few referred to dictionaries, and most compared notes with a friend, alternately competing and collaborating. For a small number, divorcing their title interpretation from the pictures on the page seemed nearly impossible; they couldn't find more than one meaning because their mind immediately went to the obvious and then shut off. Carolyn matched these students with a partner and encouraged them to read titles to one another, holding the magazine so that the listener couldn't see the article. This roughly simulated the mini-lesson and encouraged struggling students to stretch their minds beyond the obvious.

By the time Carolyn called students back together to share their findings, everyone was bursting with title ideas. They shared intentional misspellings,

rhymes, oxymorons, and word repetitions. Some had found three, four, or five different interpretations of titles. A few had extended their search to subheadings and captions. Perhaps more important, students also found a purpose in their search. In response to Carolyn's standard, "What did you discover today?" students commented, "Words can mean different things, depending on how you use them," "Authors sometimes try to trick you to make you think," "You can't just look at something and think you're done; you have to really think about it," and, my favorite, "Looking at feature articles can be fun."

The fun with word play lasted throughout the study. Students were challenged to add new findings to the class "Tricky Titles" board (with friendly competition quickly developing to add the most or the most original tricky titles), and especially intriguing titles served as whole-class brainteasers. These activities very much encouraged students to pay close attention to language, not only in feature articles but in other aspects of their lives as well. Students contributed "tricky titles" from history texts, science articles, their parents' newspapers, and even their favorite Internet chat rooms.

From the first days of the study, Carolyn had been laying the groundwork to encourage students to think about feature articles in terms of ideas. Rarely did she ask students about cool facts or interesting information in their reading; instead she would query, "What is this article about?" or "What idea is the author communicating?" Simple questions but very hard to answer. Students were not used to thinking about nonfiction text as containing any ideas. Many had been trained to read articles and informational texts for the purpose of picking out facts; they had been taught to break the information down rather than put it together. Over and over again students collected wonderful insights and detailed facts from the features of the text and engaged in lengthy and animated discussions, only to shut down when asked to synthesize their findings. Suddenly their vocabularies were reduced to two- or three-word phrases. "It's about space," they would report, or "The main idea is wild ponies." These abbreviated responses were not ideas, they were just topics, which would provide little help for making sense of the reading itself. After all, an article about "space" could go in any number of directions. It could describe space travel in the future, its possibilities and its risks. It could advance new theories about the origins of the universe. It could compare the fantasies of science fiction writers with the realities of the limits of science. To simply say that the article is about space tells the reader little about what to expect from the article or how to connect the facts and ideas encountered during a reading of the text.

Students needed to see that information necessarily breeds ideas, and that, in the case of feature articles, much of the work of developing an idea or understand-

ing of the information has already been done by an author. Feature article writers have sorted through the available information, organized it, and written about it in such a way that a coherent understanding is developed. As readers, it is our job to recognize that understanding. We need to stop and consider, "How is the author organizing these facts?" "What does he or she want me to understand about this information?" "What's the main idea of this article?"

Carolyn had modeled her own responses to these questions with several articles, and during shared readings students could, with considerable guidance, find the ideas in text. But on their own, they were having tremendous difficulty. After a week without much progress, everyone was getting frustrated. So Carolyn and I decided to try a different approach. Instead of waiting until students had read all or part of an article to ask about the main idea, we decided to use just the information that students could read from the features. This approach would provide a limited but focused set of data. It would eliminate the need for understanding the text, instead allowing students to predict a main idea based on photographs, titles, captions, and charts. Synthesizing this information into a prediction would force students to move beyond their literal interpretation of the text and into the realm of ideas and concepts.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 3—Reading Workshop

AREA OF STUDY:	Reading comprehension
FOCUS:	Predicting the "big idea"
TEXT:	"Dancing with Pride," by Steph Smith, from <i>Scholastic News</i>
RESPONSE:	Class chart of "big ideas" for "Dancing with Pride"; individual development of "big ideas" for independently selected articles

"Today we are *not* going to look for the main idea," Carolyn announced, much to everyone's relief. It was time to reframe students' thinking, and changing the language of the classroom was a part of that goal. "Instead, we are going to think about the facts." The anxiety visibly eased from students' faces. They were good at facts. "I want you to take a look at this article and just think about the features for now. What are the facts that you can see or infer from the features?" Students spent several minutes looking over "Dancing with Pride," an article about two Native American boys and their participation in the dances of their culture. Soon students' papers were filled with notes and highlights, and Carolyn had filled a chart at the front of the room with their observations.

She took a deep breath; here was the make-or-break question: "Now, why do you think the author chose to include these facts with this article? What does she want you to understand?" The students puzzled over the question. They looked at

the chart. They looked at their papers. Finally, Victor spoke up: "I think the author wants me to understand that Native Americans have a strong culture." Carolyn and I mentally let out big sighs of relief. "That's a great idea, Victor. Why do you think so?" "Well, because she uses really positive words to describe the culture, like *pride* and *beauty* and *celebrate*. And also the biggest picture on the page is of the two kids dancing in their costumes. So it seems like the culture must be really strong and important."

Victor had got it! Carolyn recorded his response on the chart paper and then encouraged other students to share their ideas. "What else might the author want you to understand?" Responses ranged from "I think the author wants us to understand that Indian kids have to go between two cultures" to "I think the author wants us to understand that Native Americans have a cool dance." All were able to support their ideas with evidence from the text, and no one gave the brief answers that had been typical when we had talked about main ideas in the past. We had found the right question to ask.

After recording a variety of student responses, Carolyn let the students in on a little secret: they had just found the main ideas of the article! The reaction was a mixture of delighted surprise at their success and shocked indignation at having been tricked. "What was different this time?" Carolyn wanted to know. "Your question made me think about it different," Vendric explained. "Before, I was thinking about the topic, but now I'm trying to figure out what the author wants me to know about the topic." "It's like this way you're thinking about the ideas behind the facts, not just the facts themselves," Ashley said. Together the class agreed to rename this kind of thinking. Gone was the term "main idea"; from here on out, students would be looking for the "big idea" and focusing on the question "What does the author want me to understand about this information?"

To cement their understanding and capitalize on their renewed enthusiasm, Carolyn instructed the students to go back to the articles that they had previously examined: "Review your notes, reread the features, and think, 'What does the author want me to understand about this information? What is the big idea?'" Changing the terms of the question dramatically changed the level of student understanding. Certainly, as Carolyn and I roamed the room, we continued to need to nudge a few students in the right direction. But now all were beginning their response with the phrase "I think the author wants me to understand . . .," and all were completing their response with an idea. At the end of the workshop we called students back together and created a Before-and-After chart to display their learning. Linda then summed up the new attitude of the class with the challenge, "Okay, feature article, bring it on! We're ready for you!"



In the days that followed, Carolyn and I built on students' new understanding of the "big idea" concept. We continued to encourage them to develop an initial big idea based only on the text features. Then, as they read the article, they were instructed to pause occasionally to consider the following questions: What new information do I have? How does that new information fit with what I knew before? What is the big idea now? How has it changed? Asking and responding to these questions ("Before I thought that the author wanted me to understand . . . Now I think the author wants me to understand . . .") helped students to synthesize the bits of information in the text, understanding how they fit together and why they were important.

Gradually, we began to introduce longer and more complex articles, replacing articles from *Ranger Rick* and *Scholastic News* with texts from *New York Times Upfront* and *Scientific American Explorations*. These new, meatier texts presented students with a challenge: rather than simply one big idea these texts often contained many. Although still grouped around a single main concept, longer feature articles are typically divided into sections, and each section in the text has a big idea of its own.

To deal with these more sophisticated texts, students needed a more sophisticated approach. Simply pausing occasionally to think, "What's the big idea and how has it changed?" wouldn't provide them with the depth of understanding that these more complex feature articles required. We still wanted students to be able to synthesize a larger understanding, but we needed it to be based on a recognition of the many smaller ideas contained in the article. So we decided to teach students to outline.

Outlining nonfiction feature articles has widespread application. Many history and science teachers encourage their students to outline content readings; study skills classes often teach the technique as an essential study skill. I frequently outlined my own readings during college. Doing so helped me to see the information and ideas through a clearer lens; it helped to crystallize my understanding. Carolyn's students experienced similar learning. After they went through the process of outlining an article, the typical response was "Oh, now I get it!"

However, teaching outlining in the abstract felt somewhat uncomfortable. Yes, there was a long-term learning purpose behind the practice, but we needed a more immediate application. So Carolyn and I turned to talk. Throughout the study students had been sharing ideas with one another informally. That's what you do when you discover a great idea or piece of information, you share. Now we wanted to capitalize on this natural desire to share by making the opportunity more rigorous. Rather than simply "turn to your partner and share," we would require students to formally present articles to one another. Doing so would teach students necessary oral presentation skills and provide them with a great opportunity to use their outlines for an authentic purpose.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 4—Reading Workshop

AREA OF STUDY:	Accountable talk
FOCUS:	Presenting an article
TEXT:	"Sudan's Lost Boys Find a Home," by Ritu Upadhyay, from <i>Time for Kids</i> ; various other texts
RESPONSE:	Class chart of presentation guidelines; independent text outlines and student-to-student presentations

Carolyn tacked her outline from the previous day's mini-lesson on the wall:

Ms. Sommer's Outline of "Sudan's Lost Boys Find a Home"

- I. The Lost Boys endured tremendous hardships in their struggle to escape war.
 - A. Started in 1987.
 - B. Families were killed, boys escaped because tending cattle.
 - C. Thousands traveled Sudan to Ethiopia, later Ethiopia to Kenya.
 - D. Traveling for 10+ years.
- II. Coming to America has been a difficult adjustment but will be worthwhile if the education they receive will allow them to someday return home to help their country.
 - A. Living in apartments or with families.
 - B. All consider school very important.
 - C. Older ones work minimum wage jobs.
 - D. Adjustment to new culture very hard.

Big Idea: The Lost Boys are an amazingly resilient group, who despite tremendous difficulties retain a remarkably positive attitude and an overwhelming desire to improve their futures and their country's fate.

"You know," Carolyn said, "the first thing I want to do after I read a really interesting article is to share it with someone. But if I just came to you and said, 'There's this really great article about these lost boys from Africa, and they had to travel a really long way, and now they are in the United States, and that's hard, too, but it's cool because they want to go back . . . ' you would probably be really confused." Carolyn paused and looked around. Sure enough, there were plenty of confused faces and a few giggles (they were accustomed to Ms. Sommer's acting a bit crazy in order to prove a point).

"When we share an article with someone who hasn't read it," Carolyn continued, "we need to be really organized, and we need to really understand the

article. You have been working on outlining articles in order to help make sense of those articles for yourself. But today we are going to put those outlining skills to use in order to present articles to each other. This is the type of thing that professionals do all the time. Doctors, lawyers, pilots, even mechanics need to keep up with the latest advances in their fields, but often there are too many advances and too many articles for everyone to read every article. So they have 'literature reviews,' gatherings where people will present an article that they read to the group so that everyone can understand the important information. Presenting articles to your peers in this classroom will prepare you for when you are a professional someday, and it will be a great opportunity for you to share the articles you've found during our study."

Carolyn turned to the chart revealing her outline of "Sudan's Lost Boys Find a Home." "Yesterday, you helped me create an outline of this article," she said. "Together we thought through each section of the text, considering the main idea of that section and the supporting details. Then we synthesized all of those pieces to reach our understanding of the big idea of the article. Today, I'm going to use these notes in order to clearly present the article. Of course, it would be really boring to just read my notes word for word. When I'm talking to someone, I need to judge by their reaction what they are and aren't understanding and adjust accordingly. If they are obviously really interested, then maybe I'll want to share more details; if they are confused, I might have to rephrase something; or if they look impatient, I may choose only the most important parts to share. But no matter how I choose to adjust things as I speak, having an outline will help me to make things clear. Let me show you."

Carolyn paused for a moment to step into the role of presenter. She gave a short, clear, engaging speech about the ideas presented in the article. As she spoke, she used her finger to point to the notes that she was referring to. Her students were impressed. "You really sound like a professional, Ms. Sommer," Ashley said, "I mean, you could be on TV or something, like an expert!" Carolyn laughed and insisted that her students could do it, too. "But let's think about what 'it' is for a minute," she suggested. "What steps did I take to prepare and present this article?" The class debriefed their teacher's process and, in so doing, created a guide for their own work:

Preparing and Presenting an Article

1. Read and outline the article.
2. Review your notes to prepare.
3. Introduce your article by telling the title and author first.
4. Talk through your outline one piece at a time.
5. Emphasize the ideas. Pause between sections.

6. Use your own words. Don't just read off the outline.
7. Speak slowly and confidently.
8. Look at your audience.
9. Adjust your talk according to your audience's reaction.
10. Conclude by sharing the "big idea."
11. Ask if anyone has any questions.

"Now it is your turn," Carolyn informed the class. Since this was a first try, and since many were still struggling a bit with outlining, Carolyn arranged the activity so that students would have a significant amount of support. She distributed two different articles: an article about cave exploration to half the class and an article about sharks to the other half. Students were instructed to work with a peer who had been assigned the same article as they read, outlined, and prepared their presentation. This opportunity allowed students to get help as they read and outlined the article as well as to practice their presentation on an audience familiar with the subject.

After about thirty minutes of preparation, it was time for the main event. Students were paired with a partner who had read the other article. Carolyn reminded them of the presentation guidelines, made certain that each was seated directly opposite his or her partner, and then set the clock timer for one minute.

Some students raced through their presentations, finishing with plenty of time to spare. Others added many details and didn't make it through the article before the timer went off. We weren't too concerned about time this first day; it would take some practice for students to learn how to adjust their presentations to an appropriate time limit. However, using a timer was a great way to keep students organized and focused.

The timer was reset, and the presentation responsibilities shifted to the other partner. When both had had a chance to share their articles, students debriefed, first with each other and then as a whole class. They shared common difficulties and successes and explained what made listening to a presentation interesting or confusing. Several requested copies of the article they had not read. Nearly all the students agreed that the experience of presenting a text made their own reading more thoughtful. "Before, I would have just read it and thought a little about it and then put it away," Brandon admitted. "But knowing I was going to have to tell someone else about it made me really think about what it all meant and why it was written. Now I'm really gonna remember it."



Setting up presentation opportunities had a dramatic effect on students' willingness to read and outline nonfiction texts carefully. Suddenly they were reading for

an authentic purpose, and because of this they were much more willing to be thorough and thoughtful in their reading. Wanting to make sure that presentations carried weight, Carolyn was careful not to overuse these opportunities. She typically scheduled two or three days for presentations each week, with one of those days including individual presentations to the whole class. She always maintained time constraints and consistently held students accountable by listening in on the conversations herself, getting feedback from peers, and using a rotating set of tape recorders. To support further growth, Carolyn taught students to listen carefully and respond to one another's talks, to ask questions and probe for clarification. For students who struggled with aspects of thinking through an article and preparing a presentation, Carolyn provided small-group support—working step-by-step through a common article together—and individual conferences. As students grew more confident and capable, they were increasingly encouraged to choose more challenging texts to share; this increased their motivation and sent them delving into a huge range of magazines as they sought out the coolest, grossest, or weirdest articles possible.

In the final weeks of the study, students spent much of their time engaged in reading or presenting their texts. Less and less time was spent in whole-class lessons. But difficult though it was to interrupt them, Carolyn wanted to be sure students understood that it is not just the author's understanding of the facts that matters. Yes, the author has interpreted the facts, and that interpretation is presented in the text. And, yes, it is important that we, as readers, understand the author's interpretation. But, as readers, we don't just have to accept the author's interpretation and set it aside. We need to interact with that understanding, to connect it to what we already know, ask questions, and ultimately make the understanding our own. This is a crucial part of reading and understanding nonfiction text. So Carolyn decided to tear students away from their reading for one more important lesson.

SAMPLE LESSON: **Week 5—Reading Workshop**

AREA OF STUDY: **Reading comprehension**

FOCUS: **Responding to an article**

TEXT: **"Expanded Drug Tests in Schools?" by Peter Vilbig, from *New York Times Upfront***

RESPONSE: **Class discussion; reading response journal reflections**

Carolyn passed out the latest copies of *New York Times Upfront* and asked students to open to the appropriate article and read it. It was wonderful to be able to sit back and watch as students read, scribbled notes in the margins, highlighted, and outlined portions of the article on their own.

Finally, Carolyn broke the silence: "Tell me about this article." Students readily described the text. "It was about the issue of privacy versus the issue of safety," Linda began. Several other students supported this assertion, detailing important aspects of the case of an Oklahoma high school student who argued all the way to the Supreme Court that being made to take a drug test in order to participate in school activities violated her Fourth Amendment rights. Their explanations were thoughtful and succinct, clearly representing the big ideas of the article. They had come a long way.

Then Carolyn posed a second, newer question. "So, what do you think?" she asked. Then, wanting to make sure that students didn't merely "take sides" on Lindsey Earls's case, she elaborated: "Do you think there really is a conflict between privacy and safety? Can you think of any other examples of this conflict? Do you question the school's decision in this case? What would you do if you were Lindsey Earls?"

It was like opening a can of worms. Suddenly, every hand in the room was up; students were eager to respond. And the responses were good. Because students had thoroughly thought through the article and understood the underlying conflict that was discussed, their responses were not simply "That's horrible" or "Ooo, she had to pee in a cup," reactions that would have been expected a few weeks earlier. Instead students were much more thoughtful as they integrated this article into their larger understanding. Several students connected the experience of Lindsey Earls to a recent "thong check" that a vice principal had conducted at a dance at a local high school. Others saw similarities between school drug tests and airport security checks. Some put themselves into the shoes of the school administration, voicing the pressure from parents and the community to keep schools safe. And a few wondered aloud about the decreased levels of privacy in the wake of September 11.

Twenty minutes later, Carolyn talked the students back through their contributions and gave names to the techniques that they had used naturally. She pointed out the connections, comparisons, questions, concerns, and perspectives they had used. She explained that good readers of nonfiction do all these things when they respond to an article. "Of course, they don't do every one of those things with every article," she said. "But good readers will respond to the text using one or more of these responses. Doing so makes the text real, connects it to their world, and synthesizes it into their own understanding."

As the study drew to a close, Carolyn and I worked to ensure that students would be able to broadly apply their learning. We reviewed their growth with the class, pointing out what had been learned and why it was helpful. We brought in samples

of texts used in seventh-grade science and history classes. Applying their nonfiction reading strategies to these texts now, while their learning was still fresh, would provide students with the confidence and knowledge they would need to be able to use these strategies successfully during the coming years. And we encouraged students to be aware of the availability and use of feature article-style text in the world outside the classroom.

Teaching the Unit—Writing Workshop

A great feature article begins with a great topic. Of course, feature articles can be written about nearly any topic, but not every topic is appropriate for every writer. In the classroom it is particularly important for students to choose a topic carefully. Topics should be close to the students—things they already know a lot about and for which they can obtain additional information easily. Topics also need to be interesting for the students. As writers, they will grapple with these topics for several weeks, and it is important that they be truly engaged in learning and communicating about those topics. Finally, topics need to be unique: students need to have a fresh understanding of a topic that has not previously been communicated to this audience. As writers, they should feel a pressing need to share their own unique understanding of the world (or some small part of the world) with others through a feature article. This is their big idea.

Carolyn had talked through these goals with her students, encouraged them to comb through their writer's notebooks for ideas, reviewed the diversity of topics in the articles that they had read, and modeled her own process of trying out and discarding ideas. But after several days of digging, reviewing, and modeling, conferences revealed that students were still struggling with topic ideas. Most were stuck thinking about topics that sounded like what they had read in *National Geographic Explorer* or *Time for Kids*. Students wanted to write about sharks or mummies or something similar—big topics that were vague in their focus and distant from most students' experience.

"What am I doing wrong?" Carolyn asked me after class one day. She wasn't doing anything wrong, but coming up with topics in isolation is a challenging process for any writer. Most writers of nonfiction articles work in collaboration with an editor who can help guide their thinking process before, during, and after writing. These students, none of whom had ever written a feature article before, desperately needed an editor to guide them, and they needed one soon, before they got frustrated and gave up. We decided to "fishbowl" an editor-writer conference with the students to help them gain insights into the considerations that typically go into the topic selection process. This "sneak-peek" would support our

Writing Workshop—Feature Article Goals and Instructional Focus Progression

	Text Structure Study	Writing Process Study
	Goal: Students will recognize and learn to use the structures and techniques of expository text. When crafting a feature article, students will learn to choose structures and techniques appropriate to their topic and "big idea."	Goal: Students will learn to share their unique understanding of a familiar topic through the construction of a well-organized and thoughtfully crafted feature article.
Weeks 1-2	Defining a Feature Article Students will construct a clear definition of a feature article. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the defining characteristics of a feature article? What is the purpose of a feature article? Why do writers write feature articles? How are feature articles different from other forms of nonfiction text such as a research paper, investigation, or editorial? Understanding the Scope of a Feature Article <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kinds of topics can feature articles be about? What kinds of information might they include? What are appropriate sources of information for a feature article? How does the purpose of the article help to determine the kinds of information that are included, and vice versa? 	Finding a Topic and a Purpose Students will find a topic that is familiar to them but that would prove new to their audience. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the topic familiar? Is it interesting? Do you have a unique understanding of the topic? Explain. What do you want your readers to understand about the topic? What is the "big idea"? Gathering Information Students will gather appropriate information from easily accessible sources.
Weeks 3-4	Understanding the Structure of Feature Articles Students will analyze texts to determine common organizing structures found in feature articles. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do authors organize their information? How does the organizing structure support the topic or "big idea"? How would the reader's understanding of the topic change if the text were organized differently? Crafting Expository Text Students will analyze and learn to use techniques appropriate for crafting nonfiction text. Techniques to consider include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topic sentences—linking information to ideas. Introducing speakers and sources of information. Placement of information within a paragraph. Organizing paragraphs. 	Getting Organized Students will organize their information using an appropriate structure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which organizational structure works best for your information and "big idea"? Why? How can your information best be organized within that structure? How would your article change if you used a different organizational structure? Outlining and Drafting Students will outline their article and then draft it in a manner that incorporates appropriate expository text elements.
Weeks 5-6	Crafting an Introduction, Conclusion, Title, and Text Features Students will analyze effective strategies for creating introductions, conclusions, titles, and text features that engage their audience and support the "big idea." For each element, students should consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In published texts, which introductions, conclusions, titles, features, etc. are most effective? Why? What is the purpose of each of these elements? How do authors shape these elements to engage their audience? How do authors shape these elements to support the "big idea" of the article? 	Review and Revision Students will learn to reread and revise their text to ensure that all aspects of their writing are connected to a "big idea." Evaluating the Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a set of evaluation criteria Measure your final published piece against established criteria Reflect on learning

subsequent individual writing conferences with students and empower them to begin to think like editors themselves.

SAMPLE LESSON: **Week 1—Writing Workshop**

AREA OF STUDY: **Writing process**

FOCUS: **Finding a topic and a purpose**

RESPONSE: **Topic revision; written explanation of new topic**

Tinika shyly took a seat across from me as the students gathered their chairs into a circle around us. Once they were settled, I turned to the students around us first. “Most of you have been working hard to find topics to write about, and that is great. But I know that it’s hard to know if your topic is appropriate. So today I’m going to play the role of magazine editor, and Tinika is going to play the role of feature article writer, and we are going to have an editor-writer conference about her article ideas. This is the kind of conference that many writers would have with their editors before they begin writing. It helps writers to focus their topics, and it helps editors know what to expect as they prepare their overall publication. While we are talking, I want you to keep track of the questions or concerns that I have about Tinika’s topic. Write them down in your notebooks, because chances are, you’ll need to think about many of the same questions and concerns for your topic.”

Once the other students were focused on their responsibilities, I could devote my full attention to Tinika. “I understand that you have an idea for an article. Tell me about it.” Tinika quickly outlined her initial idea: “I want to write about TV shows.” “Okay, what about TV shows do you want to write? Why should our readers read an article about TV shows instead of simply turning on the TV and watching the show?” “Well, I guess I was thinking that I could write about what goes on behind the scenes; that would be interesting,” Tinika replied hesitantly. “Yes, that could be interesting, but do you know what happens behind the scenes?” “Well, I’ve read a couple of articles about it.” “That’s a start, but chances are that our readers would have read a couple of articles about that, too. You need to have a new perspective, a new point of view, and in order to do that you need to be able to be close to the topic. Do you know anyone who works behind the scenes at a TV show that you could talk to?” “No,” Tinika admitted, “but I do know people who watch a lot of TV!” “Well, maybe that is where we can go with this. Tell me about the people you know who watch a lot of TV. What have you observed about them?” Tinika responded, “I’ve noticed that sometimes the TV can cause a lot of fights. Like if I want to watch something different than my brother at the same time, or if my brother wants to watch something that our

mom doesn’t want us to see.” “Good, this sounds like it could be interesting. Maybe what you really want to write about is TV’s impact on the family. Do you know people outside your family where TV causes stress? Will there be other people you can interview for this article?”

A combination of relief at finding a topic of which her “editor” approved, and excitement about the topic itself, swept over Tinika’s face. “Oh yeah! I have plenty of friends that I can talk to and people that I can interview.” “Wonderful. Now, before you leave, let’s think this through one more time. We know that you’ll be able to interview people, but will you also be able to find other resources, like research studies or statistics on TV watching? Will this topic be narrow enough? We don’t want you writing a twenty-page article. I think your perspective is unique, and I haven’t seen a lot written about this topic in popular magazines, so I think it will be interesting for our audience, but what about you? Will you find this topic interesting? Is this a concept that you feel is important to communicate with an audience?” After each question I paused, and Tinika and I thought it through. As we concluded, she left with a big smile on her face, thrilled with the success of her interview.

I turned to the class and saw a forest of raised hands. Vendric spoke out, “Ms. Lattimer, can I go next?” The other students nodded. They had seen the success of Tinika’s interview and now wanted a chance of their own. We took two more. During his conference, Jonathan moved from a general interest in soccer to wanting to write about Mexican-American reaction to the match between Mexico and the United States in the World Cup. Ashley shifted her original interest in “fashion” to a more focused interest on the amount of time and money that teenagers are willing to spend on their appearance. Each of the “fishbowl” conference participants became more focused in their thinking and more aware of their audiences and their potential resources as a writer.

Despite student protests, three conferences were enough. It was time to shift the responsibility to the students. Together we created a list of the most common questions or concerns from an “editor”:

Choosing a Topic—Questions from the Editor

- Is the topic interesting to you?
- Who are your readers? Will the topic be interesting to them?
- Is the information new? Explain.
- Is your perspective new? Explain.
- Will you be able to find information about your topic? Where?
- Is the topic narrow enough? Explain.
- What will you want your readers to understand about your topic? What will be your purpose or big idea?

Then we moved into workshop. Carolyn and I instructed students to think through the common “questions from the editor” on their own. They could work in their notebooks or talk with a friend. We would still be available to confer, but they were expected to at least begin the process of narrowing their topic on their own.

Although not everyone came away with a great topic on this day, over the next several days of thinking, conferring, and refocusing, wonderful ideas consistently emerged. As a teacher, it was pure joy to see the excitement on a student’s face when he or she found a topic that was truly exciting, something personal that could be shared with others. I thought Elizabeth was going to fall over in amazement when I kept insisting, “Yes, you can write about the difficulties that immigrant children face as translators for their parents.” “But I have never read any other articles about it; are you sure it’s okay?” Well, it would provide a unique perspective into a phenomenon that is increasingly widespread but infrequently acknowledged. This was more than okay; this was exactly what a feature article was supposed to do.



As soon as students were secure and satisfied with their topics, the rush to gather information began. Initially, students put all their emphasis on getting to the Internet. Despite the fact that we had intentionally steered their topic selection toward the familiar, previous experience with research papers told students that they needed hard facts. And, in their mind, the Internet was the best possible source of hard facts.

But this was not a research paper. It was a feature article, and as such, the information needed was different. We didn’t want a paper filled with distant facts, we wanted articles that used familiar information in unique ways. We wanted students to learn to shape their own experiences and observations of the world into text. However, when Carolyn and I tried to pull students away from the computer, they looked at us like we were obstructing them. They didn’t yet fully appreciate the scope of possibilities for feature articles, and they certainly didn’t think of friends or neighbors as legitimate sources of information. The following lesson was designed to expand their understanding of the possible sources of information that can be used for a feature article.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 2—Writing Workshop

AREA OF STUDY: Text structure

FOCUS: Understanding the scope of a feature article

TEXTS: “Playgrounds of the Future,” by Kendall Hamilton and Patricia King, from *Newsweek*; “Paid to Play Games,” by Robert Sullivan, from *Time for Kids*; “Dancing with Pride,” by Steph Smith, from *Scholastic News*

RESPONSE:

Analysis of articles to determine types of information used; independent determination of types of information appropriate to individual topics

On the overhead Carolyn placed a transparency of “Playgrounds of the Future,” a feature article that students had read earlier in the week during reading workshop. Their task today, she explained, was to analyze the types of information that were included in this article. Together, the class read through the first few sentences:

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, seventh-grader Josh Hartley is helping to build a wet-sand dam at Jack Fisher Park in his hometown of Campbell, California. A six-year-old “reinforces” the dam with twigs. Another presses a button that floods a concrete channel with water, to test the structure’s mettle. The barrier holds. “It’s pretty cool,” says Hartley. “You feel like you’ve accomplished something.”

Carolyn stopped. “Okay, what information was in the text that we just read?” Her question was initially greeted with silence. Finally, Edgar spoke for the class, commenting, “Ms. Sommer, there wasn’t any information. There was just a story about some kids playing at a playground.” “Yes, there was a story about kids playing at a playground,” Carolyn responded, “and that, Edgar, is information.” On the overhead Carolyn wrote the word *story* next to the sentences she had just read. “Think of it this way,” she explained to the class. “Does the story teach us something about playgrounds? Does it support the big idea of the article? If the answers to those questions are yes, then it’s a source of information.”

“But Ms. Sommer,” Karla interjected, “there’s a quote there, too, from one of the kids. Is that just part of the story?” “Well, what do you think? Does the quote teach us something about playgrounds? Does it support the big idea of the article?” Karla and others agreed that the quote was important but worried that it wasn’t a quote by an “expert.” “That’s okay,” Carolyn said as she wrote the word *quote* on the transparency. “Quotes don’t have to be from experts in order to be information.”

The class continued to read through the article, stopping every paragraph or so to consider the information that had been presented: what information was there, and what type of information was it? At the end, they agreed that there were essentially four types of information in this article:

Types of Information

- Examples or stories
- Quotes from everyday people
- Expert opinions and quotes
- Facts, laws, and statistics

Carolyn then challenged students to take a look at two other articles on their own. “Most of the information that you’ll find will fall into these four categories,” she explained, “but not every type of information will be found in every article. The type of information that is used depends on the author’s purpose. As you look at these two articles I want you to consider what types of evidence are used, and why the author chose to use that type of information.”

Students set to work and quickly discovered the differences. “Paid to Play Games” was filled with statistics. A few expert quotes added flavor, but mostly the article was full of fact after fact about the amount of money that superstar athletes make compared with the salaries of teachers and of the president of the United States. On the other hand, “Dancing with Pride” used the story of two brothers to illustrate the reality of Native American kids today. It recounted anecdotes from their lives and used their own words as a source of information, placing no emphasis on experts or statistics. Very different articles, but both effective.

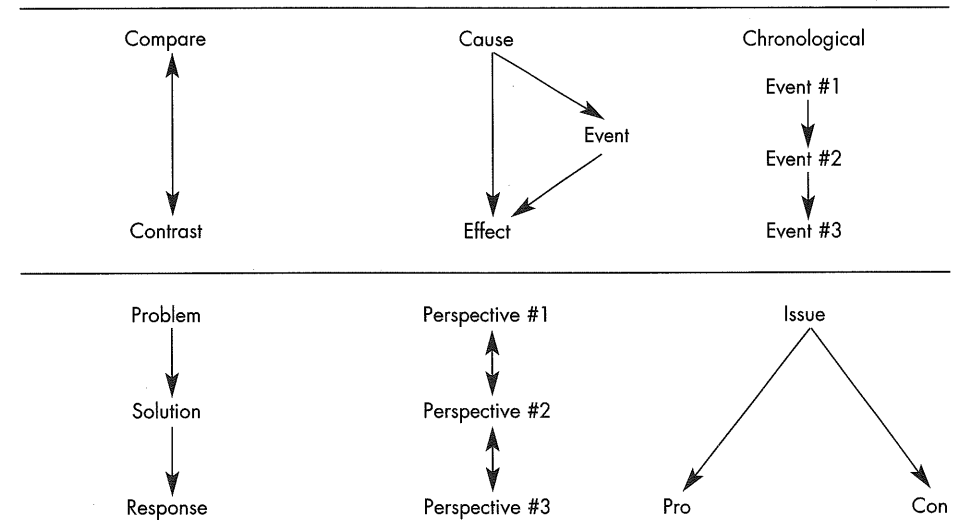
It didn’t take students long to recognize these differences, but the real question was whether they understood the reasons behind the author’s use of various types of information. Carolyn called them back together. “Why do you suppose,” she asked, “that the authors of these two articles chose such different types of information?” “Well,” Ashley said, “the article about professional athletes has to have a lot of statistics because it’s all about money, and so they have to show what different athletes make. But in the article about the Indian dancing, it was more interesting to tell the story of the kids instead of just giving statistics about the number of kids that danced and that kind of thing.” Carolyn nodded enthusiastically as other students chimed in, explaining that the types of information that were used in each case supported each author’s purpose.

“Let’s think about that in the context of your writing,” Carolyn said. “What type of information will be most effective for your topic? What information will support your purpose?” She presented the question generally, but students considered it individually: “I’m writing about Yu-Gi-Oh,” Nicholas began, “how this game is now kind of replacing Pokémon for some kids. I have been trying to find stuff on the Internet, but there didn’t seem to be a lot that was really good. It was all just about what the game is. Now I’m thinking that maybe I should be talking with kids instead. I could get some stories and maybe even some quotes from just, like, average people.” Nicholas’s shift in focus was representative of many students’. After this lesson, many shifted away from worrying about how they were going to get Internet access and instead began considering the resources available in their classroom and community.



As students gathered information, Carolyn and I repeatedly emphasized that it was quality, not quantity, that mattered. We didn’t want students to go and interview

Figure 3.1 Organizing Structures for a Feature Article



twenty different people and get a survey of opinions on a topic. We wanted them to talk meaningfully to a handful. We encouraged students to find people who would be interesting sources of information or opinions, to explain their topic, and to engage in an in-depth conversation. For those who did decide that more expert input was needed, we encouraged them to find one or two strong references and tried to point them toward some good sources.

Balancing the gathering of information with the development of a purpose can be delicate. On the one hand, you don’t want students to determine their big idea too soon. Doing so risks limiting the depth and variety of information available and often prevents them from developing a full understanding of their topic. On the other hand, students need to have a clear direction early in the process. They need to consider what type of information would be most helpful and to find appropriate sources within a reasonable amount of time. Carolyn and I tried to maintain an appropriate balance between open-mindedness and direction. We did ask students to determine an initial big idea right up-front—one that grew out of their own experiences with and prior understanding of their topic. Having a stated big idea allowed them to find better sources of information and ask better questions. However, we also encouraged students to be open to the possibility of reshaping or extending their big idea as they pursued their research and writing. We did this by discussing the growth of our big ideas for our own articles and by consistently asking probing questions during writing conferences: “Have you considered this point of view? How did that information reshape your thinking?”

“What do you want your audience to understand now?” “Which pieces of information best support your big idea?”

By the end of the second week of the study most students had gathered a reasonable amount of information and developed a fairly solid big idea for their articles. They were ready to begin to organize their quotes, stories, and facts into an appropriate structure. The problem, of course, was defining *appropriate*. Feature articles are shaped according to their topic, the information available, and their purpose. There is no one formula; there are many. Together the class reviewed and analyzed the structures of published feature articles, looking for guidance in various models. Six basic structures were found (see Figure 3.1). In the following lesson, Carolyn demonstrates how students can use these structures to effectively organize information for their own feature articles.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 3—Writing Workshop

AREA OF STUDY: Writing process

FOCUS: Getting organized

RESPONSE: Independent organization of information into an appropriate structure

Carolyn pulled the chart with the six previously determined organizing structures to the front of the class, tacked up a couple of pieces of blank white chart paper, and wrote her big idea in large print on the board:

Big Idea: Violence is increasing at youth sporting events. Parents, kids, and officials are all concerned and want something to be done. Even though it may mean training sessions and rules for parents and coaches, most welcome suggestions for reform.

She waited for the students to settle into their seats, and then she took out her notes (enlarged onto half-sheet-sized notecards) and dumped them on the table in front of the students. “As you know, I’ve been working to do research for my own article. You watched as Ms. Lattimer took me through the process of finding a topic. You helped me to figure out who to talk to for information, and you helped me determine my big idea. Now I need your help again. I have the ten pieces of evidence that I find most compelling here: a story about a violent incident at a hockey practice where one dad killed another dad; quotes from parents, players, and a referee; and two facts that relate to programs being used by leagues to try to curb violence at youth events. How am I going to organize all that information?”

Carolyn paused to let the question sink in, then asked, “What do you think? Which organizing structure makes the most sense for my information and my big

idea?” Students were very hesitant to respond. They were used to the teacher’s telling them what to do. Carolyn tried from another perspective. “Okay, then which organizing structures *don’t* make sense? For example, to me, it doesn’t make sense to use a chronological structure. I’m not writing about a particular event or series of related events, I’m writing about something that is happening in a lot of different places and affecting a lot of different people. So I would rule out a chronological structure for my topic. Do you agree?” The students agreed, and following Carolyn’s lead, they were able to eliminate three other structures that were also unlikely to work well in this instance: a compare-contrast structure, a pro-con structure, and a cause-effect structure. Although these structures might have worked under other circumstances, given Ms. Sommer’s purpose and the information she had collected, they were not appropriate for this article.

That left two remaining choices: (1) looking at the same issue from various perspectives—the player, the parent, the league official, or (2) using a problem-solution structure. Carolyn let them think through the possibilities for a few moments, then suggested they try putting the information into the two structures to see which would be most effective: “Many of you, when you try to organize your own information, will find that there may be more than one option that could make sense. In that situation, the best thing you can do is to try them both out and see which one works most effectively.”

Using a black marker, Carolyn wrote the basic outline of the first structure on a piece of chart paper: “perspective #1—players, perspective #2—parents, perspective #3—league.” Then, one piece at a time, in no particular predetermined order, she began to go through the information she had gathered. She read each short piece aloud, then asked the students, “Where should we put this in our structure?” Some pieces could be placed easily; others, after struggling, had to be set aside. Carolyn reassured students that not every piece of evidence needs to fit into every structure, but she suggested that if too many need to be left out, then perhaps the structure is not the best one. In the end, seven of the ten pieces of information found a home in the first structure. “What do you think? Does this structure work?” Carolyn asked the students. There was a tepid response. Yeah, there were opinions from players, coaches, and parents, but a lot of them said the same thing, and it might not be that interesting to just say the same thing three different times. Plus, the students were concerned that some of Carolyn’s most interesting evidence, like the story about the fight between hockey dads, didn’t even make it onto the board.

The class repeated the organizing process with the second structure, Problem-Solution-Response. The same information (Carolyn had cleverly prepared a second set of evidence cards) was reorganized into this new structure. This time information was grouped by content rather than by source. This required

more thoughtful processing by students; they couldn't just look at the name on the notecard and immediately know where to place it. As the discussion continued, it became clear that this organizing structure made more sense. Why? "It just makes more sense," explained Brandon. "I mean, the evidence fits better in it, and it will make the article more interesting because you can really describe the problem and then get into the solutions and what people think about it. That one will make it a good article. The other one seems kinda boring."

Carolyn praised the students for their work and then gave them their instructions. "I want you to follow the same process that we used together. Think about your big idea. Look at your information. Consider the structures. Figure out which structures can be eliminated. Then try out your information in the structures that remain—don't be afraid to try more than one—and figure out which one works best. Remember, the structure that I will use is the structure that will work best for my article. You may or may not use the same structure for your article; it depends on your topic and your evidence."

Despite Carolyn's suggestion, most students began by trying to organize their information into the problem-solution-response framework. For a few this worked, but for many it didn't. Fortunately, Carolyn's model had included a failure as well as a success. This helped students realize that when something wasn't quite working, there were other options to try. Because students were so close to their subjects and relatively unfamiliar with potential organizing structures, this process took time. Many had to try out three or four different structures, and the majority required considerable support to determine which structure worked best for their information and their purpose. Fortunately, students were able to try out a new structure simply by moving notecards around (rather than copying notes from paper to paper). This tactile manipulation eased frustration and allowed students to more easily see how their information, their purpose, and the structures could fit together.



After students had decided on a basic organizing structure, we encouraged them to define their plans more rigorously by outlining their ideas and information. We asked them to follow a relatively informal outline plan (similar to the one used in reverse in reading workshop), which focused on building their big idea through each section of their organizing structure. Sommer's outline follows:

Ms. Sommer's Outline of "Violence at Youth Sporting Events"

Big Idea: Violence is increasing at youth sporting events. Parents, kids, and officials are all concerned and want something to be done. Even though it may mean training sessions and rules for parents and coaches, most welcome suggestions for reform.

I. The Problem

Idea: Violence is increasing at youth sporting events. Parents, kids, and officials are all concerned.

Information

1. Referee quote
2. Parent quote
3. Story from player

II. The Solution

Idea: No one has found a solution for the problem, but several places have suggested more training and restrictions for violent parents and coaches.

Information

1. Example of training program in Florida
2. Committee suggestions for reform in local league

III. The Response

Idea: Most parents, kids, and officials welcome suggestions for reform.

Information

1. Statistics
2. Player quote
3. Parent quote

Outlining was a challenge for many, but the greater challenge came after the outlines were created and drafting was to begin. Students were stumped about how to proceed. Initially we pointed them back to their favorite feature articles: "Take a look at how 'Dancing with Pride' is written. What does the author do to explain ideas and information?" But students returned from such investigations without many answers. They needed more concrete advice; they needed to hold up an outline and a finished piece of text and see the connections between the two.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 4—Writing Workshop

AREA OF STUDY: **Text structure**

FOCUS: **Crafting expository text**

RESPONSE: **Drafting paragraphs based on outline**

"Most of you are now finished with your outlines and you're ready to start writing," Carolyn began. "But as I've been talking with you, the question I keep hearing is 'How do I put it all together?' This is a great question, and there is no one right answer. There are lots of ways to put a draft together. But I'm going to share one way with you now so that you'll have some ideas about how to get started."

She turned to two charts posted on the wall behind her. One showed her article outline. The other revealed the first paragraph that she had written for the Problem section of the text.

Parent and coach anger at youth sporting events is an increasingly common phenomenon. Bill Richardson, a soccer league referee in the Los Angeles area for the past fifteen years, says that he has definitely seen an increase in anger at his games. "In the past few years, refereeing has really not been any fun. I've gotten yelled at by coaches and parents for calls that I've made. Most parents are still really supportive, but some are just out of control. I mean, this is a youth league, not the World Cup.

Together the class read through the charts. Students were impressed with their teacher's efforts. "That sounds like a real article out of a real magazine," commented Julie. Carolyn smiled. "Well thanks. Let's take a look at what I've done and then maybe you can help me come up with some more paragraphs that sound good, too. How did I get from here"—Carolyn pointed at her outline—"to here? How are these pieces put together?"

The class dissected the paragraph and eventually decided that there were essentially three elements present:

- *A quotation.* This was taken directly from the information Carolyn had gathered.
- *An introduction of the speaker.* This was an explanation for the readers of who was being quoted and why his words mattered.
- *A topic sentence.* This connected the main idea of the section to the information.

Carolyn then walked students through the process of using those three elements to create a second paragraph for the Problem section of her article. Together they considered how to introduce the speaker, where to place the quotation, and how to tie the main idea of the section to the information in the quote. The result:

Parents and players have noticed an increase in the violence also, and for some it has made them rethink their decision to participate. Linda Fuller, mother of an eight-year-old soccer player, explains, "I'm reluctant to enroll my son in sports again next year. He loves the sport, but the coach can get really aggressive with the kids, really yelling at them if they don't win. This should be about fun and exercise. My son shouldn't come home from practice in tears."

When Carolyn read their work aloud, the students were delighted: they sounded like real magazine authors, too! "Now, I've got one more quote that I wanted to use in this section," said Carolyn. "What do you think, can you each try to come up with a paragraph on your own?" Although some were hesitant, most were willing to give it a try. Carolyn read the quotation aloud and posted it where students could see, then stood back to let them try out paragraph development on their own. Some struggled, a few erased more than they wrote, but many were able to produce fairly decent paragraphs. As they compared their work a short time later, Carolyn and I delighted in hearing students explain to one another how their work could have been made stronger. A few brave souls volunteered to read their paragraphs aloud, vividly demonstrating that more than one style could be successful and inspiring everyone by showing just how "professional" students could sound.

Once students got started with their drafting, writing a feature article didn't seem nearly as scary as they had initially feared. They learned to connect their thoughts and information, to organize their information in the most effective manner, and to choose their words carefully. The class worked together to overcome some of the common problems: "What are some different phrases I can use to introduce speakers or stories?" "How can I repeatedly refer to the big idea without sounding like a broken record?" Individual issues were addressed in conferences or small groups. Repeatedly, students were sent back to review text models, to see how other authors shaped their information or manipulated their language. An example of one such lesson follows.

SAMPLE LESSON: Week 5—Writing Workshop

AREA OF STUDY:	Text structure
FOCUS:	Crafting an introduction
TEXTS:	"Monster Pets," by Alexandra Hanson-Harding, from <i>Junior Scholastic</i> ; various other texts
RESPONSE:	Analyzing previously read feature articles to find introductions that work; identifying characteristics of those introductions

"Monster Pets," an article that had fascinated students, begins with a recounting of a violent dog attack in northern California:

Diane Whipple had just returned from the grocery store. As she took out the keys to her apartment, two enormous dogs attacked her, crushing her larynx and causing her to bleed to death.

The dogs belonged to a neighbor, Marjorie Knoller, who tried but failed to restrain the dogs. A California jury found Knoller guilty of second-degree murder. She now faces 15 years to life in prison. She and her husband, Robert Noel, were also found guilty of involuntary manslaughter.

Such convictions are rare in the U.S. In fact, never before has a California resident been convicted of murder for a death that his or her pet caused. But the jury's decision raises a key question: Are owners responsible if their pets go bad?

The vivid imagery and dramatic conclusion of this event had very much pulled students into the article as readers. Carolyn and I had decided that it would make a great model for discussing introductions with them as writers.

"Today we're going to look at how authors start their articles," Carolyn said. "We'll look at the introductions to a variety of articles that you've already read during reading workshop. But this time, I want you to think as a writer, to pass judgment on articles as you consider these questions." She pointed to the board on which she had written, "Does this introduction work? Why, or why not?" "What are the characteristics that make for a good introduction?"

Students began their introduction analysis by rereading the opening for "Monster Pets." "Does this introduction work?" Carolyn asked when they were finished. "Why?" Students universally agreed that the introduction worked, but explaining why was more difficult. "It's interesting," Tiffany said. "Okay, but why?" Carolyn pushed. "What makes it interesting?" "Well, it tells about something that was really violent," Tiffany responded. Still not satisfied, Carolyn tried again: "Yes, the incident was really violent, but how does the author make that work for the article? Why doesn't she just say, 'Two dogs attacked a woman and killed her'?" Tiffany was stumped, but Brandon jumped in to help: "That way isn't very interesting; as a reader, I would probably just skip that article. But the way she describes it is really vivid. It has lots of strong language like *enormous* and *attacked* and *crushing*. The words make it come alive."

Now we were getting somewhere. "Yes!" Carolyn exclaimed. "A strong introduction must be interesting to readers, and one way to make it so is to create strong images using strong language. Now, what else does this author do to make this introduction work?" Carolyn's question met with silence. Students weren't sure what else they were expected to find in an introduction. Carolyn redirected the question: "What if we stopped after the first paragraph. It's mostly in the first paragraph that the violence and the interesting description comes. Can we just stop there and then move straight into the body of the text? What do you think?" Students quickly expressed their belief that the second and third paragraphs of the introduction were needed, but, again, it was difficult to explain why. Then Edgar

mentioned "the big idea." A lightbulb suddenly went on as students realized that these paragraphs were needed to connect the introductory story to the big idea of the article. "Right," Carolyn agreed. "Authors have to make it clear to readers how all the pieces connect. This is especially true for the introduction, where you are first introducing the reader to your ideas and setting the stage for everything else to come. This author does a great job of building toward the idea that pets can become dangerous and that owners may end up being responsible for the actions of their pets. But think about if, instead, the article was about out-of-control lawsuits. How would you reshape the introductory story? How about if this was about the hazards of apartment living?" We could see the wheels turning as students worked to respond to these questions. Now they were thinking as writers, realizing that language and stories can be manipulated to fit the purposes behind the writing.

Wanting to strengthen students' understanding of the author's power to manipulate text as well as provide them with some additional models of successful introductions, Carolyn asked students to review articles they had previously read. "Go back, look at the introductions, find at least three that you think are successful, and then consider why they are successful. For the 'Monster Pets' article, we agreed that a successful introduction had to be interesting and build toward a big idea. Are there other criteria as well? Are there other ways to make it interesting besides using strong language and a violent example? Take a look and see what you think."

Students combed through their article folders, passing judgment, analyzing author's craft, and making notes about which ones worked. Some students, thinking ahead, made particular note of introductions that worked in articles that were similar, in topic or structure, to their own original articles. When they came back together, students agreed that the two criteria we had established with the "Monster Pets" introduction held for all introductions. They all needed to be interesting, and they all needed to build toward a big idea. But students had discovered many different ways to meet these criteria. Vivid stories were popular, but they didn't all need to be violent. Some were dramatic, others heartbreaking, others were much more average, designed to make you realize that this could happen to you. Hypothetical examples (or "stories about things that could be but didn't really happen yet") were also popular because they made the reader imagine a reality that he or she didn't like. Sometimes the introductory story was connected to the big idea by a connecting sentence or paragraph that explained its relevance. Other times, the big idea was intertwined into the introductory story itself.

"I get that I need to have a strong introduction, and I see how these other people did it," Ashley said, "but how am I supposed to do that myself? Where am

I supposed to find a story that just works so perfectly?" Looking at the other students' faces, it was clear that Ashley wasn't alone in her worry. I spoke up from the back of the circle. "Ashley, your story is about the cost of fashion—how much girls pay, and whether or not it's worth it. Right?" Ashley nodded. "So it seems like a great introductory story would be about a girl who spends a lot of money on a big day, like a prom or a big dance. You could describe what she did, how much she spent, and then her reaction, that day and then the next day. When it was all over, was it still worth it?" "Yeah, that sounds good, but where am I going to find that?" Ashley's voice took on a frustrated note. "You've got a great resource right here," I responded. "Ladies, have any of you ever spent a lot of money to make yourself beautiful for a big event?" Eight hands shot up. A few questions quickly revealed that Karla had a great story that Ashley could easily mold into an introduction. "Ooohhh!" Ashley exclaimed, turning bright red, "I know exactly how to use that! Thanks. I get it now!" Thanks to Ashley's willingness to share her own frustrations, many other members of the class "got it," too.

Over the next several days, students built on Ashley's example to find stories or hypothetical examples that they could use for their own introductions. Then we worked to shape these stories appropriately, crafting them to engage the reader and clearly introduce the big idea. During this time Carolyn and I spent a lot of time conferring individually with students about their own articles. But we also encouraged them to share their work with each other, successes as well as struggles. Seeing the ideas of a peer and listening to a classmate explain his or her process can be a powerful tool for any writer.

This pattern of learning repeated itself as the class moved into the final stages of writing a feature article. To determine how best to write a conclusion, craft titles and section headings, select illustrations, create captions, and prepare a layout, students first analyzed published texts and then experimented on their own work. We focused on one element at a time, spending one or two days on each as a class, although individual students were free to spend more or less time, depending on the needs of their article. Throughout this process, Carolyn and I provided one-on-one and small-group support, and encouraged peer collaboration. In addition, Carolyn modeled her own process as a writer as she wrote her conclusion, titles, and so on, and as she reread and revised to ensure that everything worked together to support her big idea.

In the final weeks, the classroom took on the look of a publishing house, with students at different tables working on different steps of the process. A few students were still struggling with the body of their texts. Others searched through old magazines for appropriate photos or tried out their artistic talents and drew

their own illustrations. Another table was stacked with dictionaries and thesauruses that students were using to help them develop clever titles and section headings (the word play lesson from reading workshop kicked in with a vengeance). In another area of the classroom, students sat with the various pieces of their text and features, a blank white 11" x 17" sheet of paper, and a glue stick. They moved the pieces around, trying to determine the best layout. At each of these stages students consistently impressed us by the way they used the resources around them. Carolyn and I couldn't be everywhere at once, so students turned to the texts, the lesson charts, and each other for guidance. In fact, in the last days before the articles were due, students were so engaged and so self-sufficient that Carolyn and I were really no longer needed. A bittersweet moment of success for a teacher.

Evaluating Student Progress . . .

By the end of the study, the change in attitude and ability was remarkable. Many of these students, including some who had been most adamant in their initial resistance, now told us that they liked nonfiction better than fiction. Why? "Because it can still tell a great story, but it's real. So you're entertained, and you are learning about real stuff." "Because it makes you look at the world around you differently." "Because it's just more interesting."

. . . in Reading Workshop

During the final days of the reading workshop study, each student was required to present an article of his or her choosing to the class. These presentations were designed to incorporate all the aspects of the study: reading and understanding feature articles, looking for big ideas in text, outlining ideas and information, and oral presentation. The results were impressive. Students selected a wide range of articles based on their interests and abilities. All students were able to clearly explain the topic and big idea of the article they had chosen. Most were able to explain the relationship between the information and ideas in the article. And the majority could respond thoughtfully to the article's ideas, discussing questions, connections, and comparisons of their own.

Carolyn and I were thrilled with the progress that these presentations revealed. But perhaps more pleasing was the fact that many students were applying appropriate nonfiction reading strategies even when they weren't going to have to present. In their independent reading, many took the time to preview the text features and predict a big idea before they began reading the text itself. During

informal reading conferences, students were able to explain their thinking about the ideas and information in the text in an organized fashion. Nearly all wrote notes in the margins or, when reading a textbook particularly, kept a running outline of the text as they read.

Of course, there was still progress to be made. Some students continued to have difficulty recognizing the complexity of ideas in more advanced texts. Second-language students in particular had a great deal of difficulty developing a final synthesis. They could identify the main idea in each section of an article and present a strong summary, but they had trouble stepping back and recognizing the larger concepts that the article explored. Many students remained quite reliant on the title, photos, and captions that appeared in magazine feature articles and had trouble when these aids were removed in more advanced articles and books. But despite these ongoing challenges, the study had succeeded in its most important objectives: getting students interested in reading nonfiction and providing them with the tools to meaningfully interact with the ideas of the text.

. . . in Writing Workshop

On publication day we were greeted with a wonderful variety of feature articles. Students were thrilled to display their work and savored the opportunity to explain the process of writing a feature article to visitors. The room bubbled with phrases like, "You have to really know what big idea you want to communicate," "You should choose a topic that you know a lot about, but other people may not," "Sometimes it's hard to find the right story, but if you have a good topic and you keep asking the right people, then you can find it eventually." It was delightful to listen to students' enthusiasm and to hear their pride in their work, but my favorite, oft-repeated phrase for the day was, "The next time I write a feature article I'm going to. . ."

Students had discovered the satisfaction that can be gained in communicating an idea through a nonfiction article. They now knew how to find a topic that was close to them, conduct some basic research, organize their evidence, and then put it all together in a way that represented their thinking and their understanding. Feature articles had become a communication tool for members of Carolyn's class, a way to present the writer's understanding of the world to an audience. And on publication day, as students explained their own articles and read through the work of their classmates, new ideas kept cropping up. Now the world seemed full of feature article possibilities.

This growth in appreciating the role of nonfiction writing was perhaps our most important success. Certainly, students also came away from the study with a greater understanding of process and structure in nonfiction informational writ-

ing. All knew more about nonfiction organizing structures, and most could use these structures to arrange evidence appropriately. Everyone understood topic development, and nearly everyone could narrow their research focus and make use of easily available resources. The whole class understood the importance of building an article around a big idea. Some still struggled with developing topic sentences, introducing new information, and crafting a conclusion. A few articles were presented with inappropriate titles, missing captions, or spelling errors. Work still needed to be done to improve students' nonfiction writing. But significant progress had been made, and most important, students had found a purpose in writing feature articles.

Here are samples of the feature articles that students created.

In the Middle

Elizabeth V., Grade 5

Kids who act as translators for their parents are caught between childhood desires and adult responsibilities.

Imagine yourself having to tell your parents about your homework habits in a parent-teacher conference. That's what 7-year-old Maria had to do. Her mom didn't speak English and the teacher didn't speak Spanish, so Maria was stuck translating. "I could tell the teacher held back because of me," Maria said. Maria shouldn't have had to be there, but she had no choice. "It was really awkward," she admitted later.

Helping Out

There are many kids who must translate for their parents and are put in a position similar to Maria's. Many adult immigrants arrive in this country not knowing how to speak English. However, in the workplace, government offices, and even in stores, English is needed to communicate. A lot of parents want to go to English classes, but some just don't have the time. They have to work to put food on the table and take care of their kids. Also, it is much harder for a grown-up to learn a second language. As a result, many immigrants come to depend on their children.

Not an Easy Job for Kids

But this dependence can cause problems. "I get mad because my mom tells me to ask someone something in English and I understand and can talk to the person, but then I have trouble translating their answer back into Chinese," says Jennie, 12, whose parents speak only Chinese. In addition to being frustrating, translating can also be scary. "I get scared because my mom's looking at me and depending on me, but it's intimidating to try to

do something that I'm not really old enough to do—there's a lot of pressure," explains Monica, age 16.

Hard on Parents

Kids are not the only ones who get frustrated. Sometimes parents do, too. "I get frustrated because I can understand when they speak English, but when I try to speak English, I can't make out the words, and they don't understand me," Noemi, age 36, explained in Spanish. It can also be humiliating to have to depend on your children.

Parents can also be at a disadvantage when their children don't translate correctly. Kids can take advantage by telling their parents to sign permission slips for trips they shouldn't go on or to sign a reading log when they haven't done the reading. "I took advantage of the situation many times," admitted Paul, 16, a Russian immigrant.

Advantages for Kids

Even though translating can be difficult for kids, it can also help them. A recent study by Harvard University's School of Education found that immigrant girls are usually more successful in school than immigrant boys. Part of this difference is caused by the fact that more immigrant girls are responsible for translating for their parents. This teaches them responsibility and helps them to succeed in an adult world.

Many kids of immigrants find themselves in the middle. They are forced to act more mature and at times it can be really difficult. But it is also something that many willingly do because they want to help their families. "It's hard for me to do this," says Francisco, age 13, "but I do it because they're my parents and I want to help out."

Gothic Teenagers: Misguided or Misunderstood?

Linda C., Grade 6

They dress weird, look different, and keep to themselves. . . . Do we need to be worried about these mysterious teenagers?

In the spring of 1999 two teenage outcasts shot and killed thirteen students and wounded twenty-eight others before turning the guns on themselves. This tragedy at Columbine High School was felt across the country. The two students wore black trenchcoats and many in the press immediately labeled them as Goths. This led to widespread "Goth hysteria" with people fearing anything related to the Gothic subculture and the people involved in it.

Misguided

Mainstream America, whose only contact with Goth ideas is usually through the media, believes that Goths are all about strange makeup, depression, and death. Goths are often victims of weird looks, name calling, and even having things thrown at them.

Adults often take the attitude that they are looking out for teenagers' best interests by trying to steer them away from Goth culture. Carolyn Sommer, a teacher at Wilson Academy, explains her concern: "It's one of those doors where you open it and you don't know how far back it goes. I think it is good that [Goths] are finding an identity, but I don't think most people realize that it is centered around death."

Alicia Porter, designer of the Web site "A Study of Gothic Sub-Culture: An Inside Look for Outsiders," explains the mainstream attitude. "Three words best sum up what the Goth stereotype is all about: death, pretension, and angst." She adds, however, "Like any stereotype, the Goth stereotype is a one-dimensional exaggeration and people are not usually so one-dimensional."

Misunderstood

Despite the fears that people have, the Gothic subculture is not really all that bad. "Parents think it grabs hold of teenagers and warps them. It's quite the reverse. Instead of causing suicide and depression, it gives them people to talk to. It's a catharsis," says Gavin Baddeley, author of *Goth Chic: A Connoisseur's Guide to Dark Culture*.

Many teenagers who become involved in the Goth subculture are already depressed and feel that they are isolated from the rest of the world. By getting involved with the Goth community, it gives them people who are feeling the same way to talk to and it makes them feel better knowing there are other people out there like them. "I like the clothes, I like the music, I feel comfortable. It doesn't make you more depressive, it makes you happy," explains Alison Ehrick, 22.

Even the Goth subculture's focus on death can be healthy. "Many Goths say that Gothic represents acceptance of the inevitability of death and the existence of the darker side of life. That does not mean that Goths possess an obsession with either one," explains Porter. Baddeley has a similar perspective: "I think it's healthier to be intrigued by vampires and thinking about ideas of mortality than to watch wrestling."

Coming to an Understanding

Goths are like any other group of people. Some will do bad things, but the majority won't. Dr. Jamie L. Miller, a psychologist in Escondido, explained

that in her practice she sees some Goths who get involved for negative reasons and the Goth subculture has a bad influence on them. However, she also sees some who do it to be different. For these patients the Goth subculture may have a good influence, depending on the person.

Many Goths do very well in school, get good grades, and don't have any behavioral difficulties at all. Few Goths are ever involved in crimes. "[Goths] don't cause us any problems at all. They just dress different," reports Officer Rob Newquist of the San Diego Police Department.

Most Goths just want to be left alone to pursue their interests and have no desire to cause the chaos that people fear. Jennie Dinh, a fifth-grader at Wilson Academy, understands this. "[Gothic] is what they believe in, what they do. It shouldn't be any of our business, unless they're doing things they aren't supposed to."

What's your view: Are Gothic teenagers misguided and lost or simply misunderstood?

Suggested Texts

A huge range of feature article-style texts are available, but they can be hard to collect at the last moment. Our best advice: Plan ahead. Subscribe to a few magazines at the beginning of the school year, and by January or February you should have a collection with enough depth and variety to support a feature article study.

Look beyond just the texts designed for classroom use (these are wonderful, but can feel formulaic if they are all that is available). Be careful in your selections, however. There are some wonderful teen-oriented magazines available at bookstores that can contain great feature articles—*Teen People*, *Seventeen*, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, for example—but many also contain huge numbers of ads in which students can lose themselves for days.

For older students, you may want to bring in magazines and newspapers typically designed for adults: *Newsweek*, *Time*, *National Geographic*, *Scientific American*, and so on. Additionally, great articles can be found in *Esquire*, *People*, and *Rolling Stone*. But ads and some of the content in these magazines are often inappropriate for classroom use. Clip articles and use them for whole-group or small-group lessons as appropriate.

And don't forget books. Many nonfiction books contain feature article-style writing. These can be a great supplement to your classroom collection.

Feature Articles

The following magazines are specially designed for classroom use. They have no advertisements, and most come in sets of twenty-five to thirty copies.

Grades 3–6

National Geographic Explorer. Tel.: 800-368-2728; <<http://magma.national-geographic.com/ngexplorer/>>. Published monthly. Each issue has several feature articles. Web site offers good support.

Grades 3–8

Junior Scholastic; *Scholastic News*. Tel.: 800-560-6816; <<http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/>>. Various magazines for different grade levels. Published weekly. Each issue has one or two feature articles.

Grades 3–12

Weekly Reader. Tel.: 800-446-3355; <<http://www.weeklyreader.com/>>. Various magazines for different grade levels. Published weekly. Each issue has one or two feature articles.

Grades 4–6

Time for Kids. Tel.: 800-777-8600; <<http://www.timeforkids.com/>>. Published weekly. Center article in each issue is particularly good.

Grades 6–9

Teen Newsweek. Tel.: 800-446-3355; <<http://www.teennewsweek.com/>>. Published weekly. Similar to *Time for Kids* but for an older audience.

Grades 7–12

New York Times Upfront. Tel.: 800-560-6816; <<http://www.teacher.scholastic.com/upfront/>>. Published biweekly. Several strong feature articles in each issue. Timely and well written. Great for older audience.

The following magazines are typically designed for individual subscription but are appropriate for classroom use.

Grades 3–6

OWL Magazine. Tel.: 416-340-2700. <<http://www.owlkids.com/>>.

Ranger Rick. Tel.: 800-822-9919. <<http://www.nwf.org/>>. Published by the National Wildlife Federation.

Grades 4–8

Muse Magazine. Tel.: 800-821-0115; <<http://www.musemag.com/>>.

National Geographic for Kids. Tel.: 800-368-2728; <<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngforkids/>>.

Grades 4–9

Calliope; Cobblestone; Faces; Footsteps; Odyssey. Tel.: 800-821-0115; <<http://www.cobblestonepub.com/>>.

Grades 6–9

Scientific American Explorations. Tel.: 800-285-5264. <<http://www.explorations.org/>>.

Editorial

“In a Peaceful Frame of Mind: Patients Demanding Control over Their Medical Care May Not Relinquish It in Their Final Days”

Anna Quindlen

It was the part about reading that got to me. By the time Joan and Chester Nimitz Jr. had decided to die together, their laundry list of physical losses was nearly as long as their rich and fruitful lives. Chester Nimitz, 86, a retired admiral and CEO and the son of the Pacific fleet commander in World War II, was suffering congestive heart failure, constant back pain and stomach problems so severe he'd lost 30 pounds. His wife, 89, who had gone to dental school in her native England but stayed home to raise their three daughters, kept breaking bones because of osteoporosis and needed round-the-clock care. Once she went blind, she could no longer read.

Audio books or no audio books, the very notion of becoming incapable of seeing words on the page gave me a bad case of the shudders, and suggested that the distinction between a life worth living and one worth leaving is probably different for each of us.

Some may fear grinding pain unresponsive to medication. For others it would be the constant losses of physical degeneration or the end of independence, an existence supervised by caregivers. For Joan and Chester Nimitz, who until a few years ago lived a life full of gardening and golfing and reading, it was all of those. “Do not dial 911 in the event we are discovered unconscious but still alive,” read a note left behind in their apartment at a retirement facility. It ended, “We wish our friends and relatives to know that we are leaving their company in a peaceful frame of mind.”

The greatest advance in health care in our lifetime has not been transplants or new pharmaceuticals. It has been the rise of the informed consumer. Beginning with the natural-childbirth movements and breast-cancer activism of the 1970s, inspired by AIDS patients who refused to take no for an answer, Americans have increasingly